

20-26 MAY 1976

Will the Pope Banish William Colby

by Jeff Stein

A 35-year-old former researcher in behavior modification has begun a campaign to try to persuade the Catholic Church to excommunicate William E. Colby, recently removed as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and once administrator of the CIA-sponsored assassination program in Vietnam, Operation Phoenix.

John Kelly, who has completed a book-length manuscript exploring the relationship between Colby's CIA activities and Catholic beliefs, says the church "cannot endorse the killing of civilians in a systematic way, even in warfare."

Pointing to the lack of indictments following what he sees as "criminal conduct by high US officials in Vietnam," Kelly argues that Colby should at least be censured by the church in order to deter the repetition of Phoenix-type programs.

Kelly's work has been supported by the "Campaign To End Future War Crimes," an offshoot of the Indochina Resource Center, also located in Washington.

In testimony before Congressional Committees on several occasions, Colby has admitted that the Phoenix Program, designed to "neutralize the Viet Cong political and administrative infrastructure," has resulted in the deaths of upwards of 20,000 Vietnamese citizens.

Colby, now on the lecture circuit and writing a book which is expected to defend the Agency against its numerous critics, could not be reached for comment. In a recent interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, Colby saw no conflict between his administration of the Phoenix program and his highly publicized devout Catholicism.

Kelly, also a Catholic, has met with little success in his efforts to persuade the church to banish Colby.

Last summer, he wrote to Father Jean Jadot, a French priest who is the Pope's Apostolic Delegate to Washington. Jadot responded that the matter came under the jurisdiction of the American Bishopric.

Kelly then took his letter writing campaign to Archbishop William W. Baum, now a Cardinal, who heads the Washington Diocese. Baum's only response, according to Kelly, was to sign a receipt acknowledging delivery of a registered letter.



photo by Michael McCarthy

John Kelly, Frank Forrestal and Fred Landis of the Campaign to Prevent Future War Crimes.

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But in a telephone interview last week Father Maurice Fox, Director of Communications for the Washington Diocese, stated that "as far as we know, there are no plans" to excommunicate Colby.

"An unrepentant public sinner is the type of person we excommunicate," Fox explained. "A sinner is one who commits a transgression against God. . . who knows it's against God and does it anyway." Kelly, he said, has made "a gratuitous assumption" that Colby is a sinner, or is unrepentant.

Kelly has based his campaign on the premise that Colby has violated the Fifth Commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Kill."

"The point is," he explained, "is that Colby is a flaunting Catholic, he keeps reiterating that he's a devout Catholic, going to church every Sunday, and so on. He puts himself on the line.

"Phoenix," Kelly added, "operated outside the rules of warfare—it violated the Geneva Convention. There was no due process. They were killing civilians."

According to an Iver Peterson dispatch in the *New York Times* from Vietnam in 1971, Colby assessed the Phoenix teams with a "neutralization" quota of 1800 persons per month. American officials, without attribution, admitted to Peterson that many of those killed were in no way connected with the Communists, but were wrongly identified by the Phoenix teams or caught in crossfires.

Article 3 of the Geneva Convention of 1949 forbids the execution of persons not directly involved in combat, and contains strict guidelines for due process.

Kelly recently placed advertisements in *Newsweek* in an attempt to locate former Phoenix operatives and buttress his search for incriminating evidence against Colby.

So far, he says, two former agents have replied. He has also uncovered, at the Institute for Policy Studies, a left-wing Washington think-tank, an unpublished manuscript about Phoenix, which has given him additional leads.

Kelly says the former Phoenix chief remaining at large is "a real personal concern" to him.

"The CIA is a real threat to the human race. I would like to deter any future Phoenix programs," he said. NY